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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the characteristics of effective internship field experience and programs. The internship serves an important function in preparing educational administrators, as it bridges the gap between classroom practice and professional practice. Although the internship has been an integral component of many administrator preparation programs for years, data on program design and impact on future administrators are somewhat limited. While several program designs are possible, this paper concludes that administrative internships should include the following objectives: (1) to develop understanding of various leadership theories and options and human responses to them; (2) to develop a general understanding of different school and district organizational structures, procedures, and operations; (3) to develop specific knowledge in systems administration theories; (4) to provide diverse educational administration experiences; (5) to provide experience in management strategies, curriculum development, budget preparation, leadership development, and building/district operations; (6) to provide specific experience in programmatic and personnel evaluation; and (7) to help individual visions of school mission and specific strategies for communicating and actualizing these visions. Effective internships address the intern's strengths, weaknesses, knowledge base, and interpersonal skills; the internship site; the site and university supervisors' abilities and values; and the programmatic objectives. (14 references) (MLH/Author)

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The Administrative Internship: Effective Program Characteristics

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Abstract

The Administrative Internship: Effective Program Characteristics

This paper represents a synthesis of characteristics of effective internship field experiences and programs. The internship serves an important function in the preparation of educational administrators, as it bridges the gap between classroom preparation and professional practice. An effective internship program may be designed in several ways, but it is the conclusion of this paper that the internship should address several general areas. These are:

(1) To understand various leadership theories and options as well as human actions and reactions to them;
(2) To develop a general understanding of different organizational structures in the school as well as district/building level procedures and operations;
(3) To develop specific knowledge in systems administration theories;
(4) To provide diverse experiences in educational administration through the internship activities;
(5) To gain experience in management strategies, curricular development, budget preparation, leadership development, and building district operations;
(6) To gain specific experience in programmatic and personnel evaluation; and,
(7) To develop an individual vision of what a school could and should be and establish a specific set of strategies for communicating and actualizing the vision.

The Administrative Internship: Effective Program Characteristics

The beginning of the educational reform movement in this country is popularly associated with the publication of The Nation at Risk in 1983. The reform movement initially focused on curriculum revisions for better preparing high school students for the adult world. Teacher preparation, or the absence of it, was also of primary interest during the initial reform debate. Throughout the early stages of the reform dialogue, there was an occasional, albeit limited, reference to the preparation of school administrators (Karst, 1982; Peterson & Finn, 1985; Pitner, 1982). However, as the decade of the eighties came to an end, the focal point of the debate shifted to administrator preparation with the publication of Leaders for America's Schools (1987) and Improving the Preparation of School Administrators (1989).

These two documents, by directly addressing administrator preparation, reinforced the necessity and importance of field experiences for those who desired to be principals or superintendents. Typically, these field experiences are most often delivered through a structured internship. The administrative internship has been utilized by many preparatory programs as the primary, if not the only, means by which theoretical knowledge was integrated with the practicality of the real world. Although the

internship has been an integral component of many preparation programs for many years (Hencley, 1963), data as to an appropriate design of a program and the impact on future administrators are somewhat limited (Daresh, 1987; Werner, 1988). If one accepts that an appropriately designed internship program can impact an administrator's abilities and future performance (Chance, 1989; Karst, 1982), then it becomes necessary to ascertain which elements are essential in creating an effective program. Components of such a program must "provide [an] opportunity for the prospective administrator to apply concepts, understandings, and skills" (Chance, 1990, p. 318). The central question remains as to what characteristics an effective internship program should exhibit. The primary purpose of this paper is to propose one view of a model program. The inherent opinion that theory and practice must successfully merge serves as a cornerstone for the ideas advanced.

An "ideal" program should identify and incorporate broad objectives that best represent day to day administrative activities as well as provide opportunities to utilize and synthesize theoretical constructs into the "real" world of the principal or superintendent. The program must prepare the administrator of the future to be both a leader and a manager, not only of people but also of systems. He/she must also understand how educational organizations function and that organizations both impact

and are impacted by various internal and external forces. Maintenance of the status quo with its inherent philosophy of "not rocking the boat" can no longer be acceptable in today's schools. An effective internship must take into account both the "old" that works and the "new" that will work in a rapidly changing society. The following general objectives of an internship represent an incorporation of concepts that can better prepare future administrators. These are:

(1) To understand various leadership theories and options as well as human actions and reactions to them.
(2) To develop an understanding of various district and building level operations, procedures, and organizational structures.
(3) To develop specific knowledge in areas of school systems administration.
(4) To experience broad and practical aspects of educational administration and systems operations.
(5) To have a variety of experiences in district or building level operations, management techniques, curricular implementation, and budget preparation.
(6) To gain specific skills in evaluation of personnel and programs.
(7) To develop an individual vision of what a school could and should be and establish a specific set of strategies for communicating and actualizing the vision.

In order to accomplish these broad objectives, the internship must allow for the uniqueness of each intern. Too many programs traditionally have provided a check list or menu so that once an area had been addressed the intern moved on to another area until the completed list had been dispatched. After the total menu had been completed, the internship was judged a success. Although a system such as

this may simplify the process, it does not address individual needs, strengths, and areas of weakness. The completing of a list does not necessarily equate to essential conceptual and intellectual growth of the intern. Some internship programs have utilized a systematic, mathematical formula approach in which the completion of a certain number of contact hours is equated to the acquisition of knowledge and the development of leadership skills. Such programmatic constructs as these fail to take into account individual abilities and differences. Prospective administrators do not enter the internship with similar skills or like experiences.

An effective internship model must recognize the uniqueness of each intern and discard programmatic constraints that become more important than the broad objectives of the internship. Given this tenet, neither the number of tasks completed nor the duration of time becomes a significant factor in the successful completion of the internship. Rather, the deciding consideration must rest with the level of mastery exhibited towards the established objectives.

The utilization of an individualized internship which recognizes past experiences, academic preparation, and skills provides for an incremental, sequential, and carefully orchestrated plan of growth for each intern. Designing such a plan is not easy, and it can be a time-

consuming affair for those involved in the internship. But the time invested in such a process by the intern, the university supervisor, and the field site supervisor (mentor) provides a sense of meaning to the internship that is often missing from either a menu or time driven program. The nature of its individualization means each intern successfully completes the internship based on his/her own ability. Thus, the internship may reflect one, two, or more semesters of work based upon the individualized criteria for each student.

The effective internship program should also provide time for students to share experiences as well as opportunities for continued knowledge and skill attainment. On-campus seminars, that this author prefers to identify as clinical activities, can serve this dual purpose. These clinicals, when suitably designed, can further meld the theoretical with the practical. Clinicals should be constructed so that students can "develop skills in problem framing/solving, and assimilate into their belief systems the value of collaborative problem solving" (Short & Asbaugh, 1988, p.2). Clinical activities can aid in the development of specific skills such as program evaluation and supervision or can facilitate the intern's broader understanding of the symbiotic nature of schools and society.

The use of daily/weekly reports by the intern are useful if they provide the opportunity to reflect, evaluate, synthesize, and describe internship activities. There are many alternatives for reporting what has transpired at the internship site. Werner (1988) suggested "a log of experiences" (p. 3) while Schon (1987) advocated a reflection in action model. Whatever format or design is chosen, it is important that the activity allow the intern to report events, evaluate individual behavior, identify theoretical constructs utilized during the event, and, finally, ascertain what was learned from the reported activities.

The internship can only succeed if the intern's field site is appropriate to the individual internship's objectives. The site supervisor or mentor is also crucial to the process. Both should be selected carefully and reflect the intern's abilities. Ideally, each intern would commit to a full time internship which would proffer some acceptable level of renumeration, either from the local district or the university. However, the economic reality is that local districts, universities, or interns rarely can afford to develop such a fiscal relationship. Most interns find it necessary to complete their internships in concert with their regular place of employment. If this is the best possible alternative for the intern, then the site supervisor becomes even more important to the process. The

individual selected to locally supervise and mentor must have a full understanding and commitment to both the objectives and design of the internship. This necessitates a significant level of communication between all members of the trilogy - the intern, the university supervisor, and the site supervisor - that may not have been necessary under traditional internship programs. Items relating to the individualized internship plan, the reporting format, the clinical activities, and any evaluative process must be equally discerned by all.

As previously indicated, the opportunity for each intern to share experiences while recognizing common concerns is an important component of the internship model. Erlandson (1979) saw this type of activity as substantive because it provided the intern a way to increase his/her knowledge. Such sharing should take place several times during the internship because it assists the interns in developing what Griffiths (1988) identified as "a feeling for administration" (p. 17).

Finally, since an internship is most likely bound by a set of rules and regulations of the host university, there should be some established procedure to evaluate the intern and his/her experiences. Foremost, it is necessary to determine whether the intern accomplished the specific individualized goals and objectives of the internship. It is also relevant to ascertain whether the intern was able to

work successfully in a collaborative manner with both site and university supervisors. However, even more germane to the evaluative process is whether or not the intern grew intellectually, academically, and emotionally through the internship activities. This should be decided through a meeting of the minds between all parties involved in the internship. In this activity, the intern is the expert.

The intern will know how much and to what degree his/her knowledge, skills, and abilities have been enhanced and expanded. Observation, documentation, and discussion by others in the intern trilogy is important and relevant; yet, the one who best understands and recognizes true growth is the intern. An effective evaluation system would accept the appraisal of the site supervisor and the university supervisor but would weigh it in light of the intern's self evaluation. This self evaluation could be provided via conversations, a summary report, a synthesis paper, or a videotaped self evaluation statement. The use of such a process may be difficult for some traditionalists because the evaluative onus is on the intern rather than on the university representative.

Conclusion

The effective preparation of school administrators is an essential and inescapable component of the reform movement - if reform is to succeed. As this becomes more evident to policy makers and legislators, administrator

preparation programs in this country will come under increasing scrutiny. It is incumbent upon universities, in consort with public schools, to design, develop, and implement programs which will enable future administrators to select productive and proactive postures. The internship is crucial in this process because it provides a vehicle for the melding of theory and practice. It allows the intern the opportunity to "see" through the eyes of a practicing professional.

The internship of the past, driven by contact hours and lists of tasks to be completed, will no longer suffice. Instead, an internship should provide the framework by which the individual needs of each student are considered. In order to be effective, the internship must comprehensively address the intern's strengths, weaknesses, knowledge base, and interpersonal skills; the internship site; the site supervisor's and university supervisor's abilities and values; and, the programmatic objectives. Individualized internships may take on various designs, but they will be useless if they do not provide future administrators the richness of diversity blended with the uniqueness of individualization. Only then will an internship program prepare leaders for the complexity and vicissitudes of the twenty-first century.

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